

"A SINGULAR PILE OF STONE": THE IRWIN STONE MOUND LICKING COUNTY, OHIO

by

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Introduction

Few archaeologists seem to have commented upon the concentration of large mounds and small enclosures on the west end of Flint Ridge, although many of individual sites are well known. The most conspicuous of these today is the large conical earthen mound just north of old U. S. Route 40 in Fairmount Cemetery at Amsterdam, and artifact material is known from some, notably the Rutledge Mound (Baby 1961, Hooe 1985, Morton and Carskadden 1983, Pacheco 1992). The most eastern, as well as the most elaborate of these earthworks is the Hazlett Enclosure and Mounds (Carskadden and Fuller 1967). One of the least known archaeological features of the immediate area is a large stone hilltop mound in Franklin Township in eastern Licking County. The mound is actually large enough to be indicated on the current 7.5' U.S.G.S. Glenford Quadrangle, straddling the line between Sections 13 and 18.

"A Singular Pile of Stone"

The earliest known reference to this mound occurs in Hill's *History of Licking County, O.*, which follows:

"By no means the most insignificant of the works of the Mound Builders in Franklin township is the large stone mound half a mile south of the center of the township. Its diameter at the base was originally about forty feet, but it is much more now, as an attempt made many years ago to open it and get down into the middle, resulted in greatly reducing its height (probably about twenty feet), and adding to its diameter by throwing the stone down upon all sides of it. The earth was not reached in the middle, but the height of the mound was reduced about ten feet. The late Judge Elnathan Schofield, of Lancaster, who was government surveyor during one of the earlier years of the present century, and as such run [sic] the section lines here, one of which crossed this mound, made an entry upon his field notes, after designating its locality, pronouncing it "a singular pile of stone." (Hill 1881: 421).

The 1875 Licking County Atlas shows this stone mound on the H. Irwin "Chestnut Ridge" Farm (Fig. 1). Also shown are the Moore and Coulter earthworks, a short distance to the northwest, as well as the Tippet, Moore, and Trout mounds.

The only known illustration of the Irwin Mound is in a rare pamphlet published by Newark amateur photographer, archae-

ologist, and bank president Walter Metz (1879-1936) sometime around 1903-1904 (Murphy 2008). With the recent disappearance of the copy held by Arkansas State University at Jonesboro, the only known remaining copy of Metz's pamphlet is at the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center at Fremont, Ohio. Fortunately, the glass plate negative used by Metz to illustrate the Irwin Mound was purchased in an unidentified collection of Metz's negatives at a Newark auction house several years ago. Although it has deteriorated considerably over the years, the image is still superior to the second-generation photocopy available from Metz's pamphlet and, for that matter, better than the small view presented in Metz's pamphlet. Despite fading and what at first glance looks like a giant smoke ring hovering over the mound, several human figures can be seen on top of the mound, providing scale (Fig. 2). No trace of the log snake fence remains today, nor in fact were any traces of it visible when I first visited the site in 1974.

Metz (1903: 9) estimated the original dimensions of the mound as "not less than fourteen feet and one hundred feet in diameter." Mr. Gary E. Killworth, whose family has owned Chestnut Ridge Farm, including two-thirds of the mound since 1949 recalls being told that a large part of the stone in the mound was removed many years ago to provide fill for low spots along Flint Ridge Road. Extrapolating from DeLong's (1972) geological map of the Flint Ridge area, it appears that the Irwin Mound lies slightly higher than the elevation of the Lower Mercer limestone. The sandstone is probably a local, unnamed deposit noted by DeLong as locally occupying the interval between the Lower Mercer coal and the Upper Mercer coal.

Surprisingly, this mound seems to have been ignored by Augustine Wehrle's mound-digging crews of the 1920s and 1930s (Aument 1982). Perhaps it was ignored because the center clearly had been explored years earlier. Unfortunately, even Hill's history makes no mention of what may have been found. The Wehrle Catalog (Ohio Historical Society 2004) does list two slate gorgets found on the "old H. A. M. Irwin farm" (1296W and 1601W) but the whereabouts of these artifacts is not known.

What's in a Name?

Metz simply referred to this mound as the stone mound near Linnville. According to Brent Eberhard, Ohio Historic Preserva-

tion Office, a preliminary site form was filed by Jonathan Bowen, identifying this site as 33-Li-324, the "Lutcher 5" Site (Eberhard, pers. comm., March 10, 2010). This and numerous (ca. 40) other Licking sites appear to have been shown to Bowen by the late Jim Dutcher, and it is presumed that "Lutcher" is a mistake for "Dutcher." (An e-mail inquiry to Bowen has gone unanswered.) In any case, since Henry Irwin is known to have owned the land in 1866 and 1874, it seems more suitable—certainly more meaningful—to refer to it as the Irwin Stone Mound.

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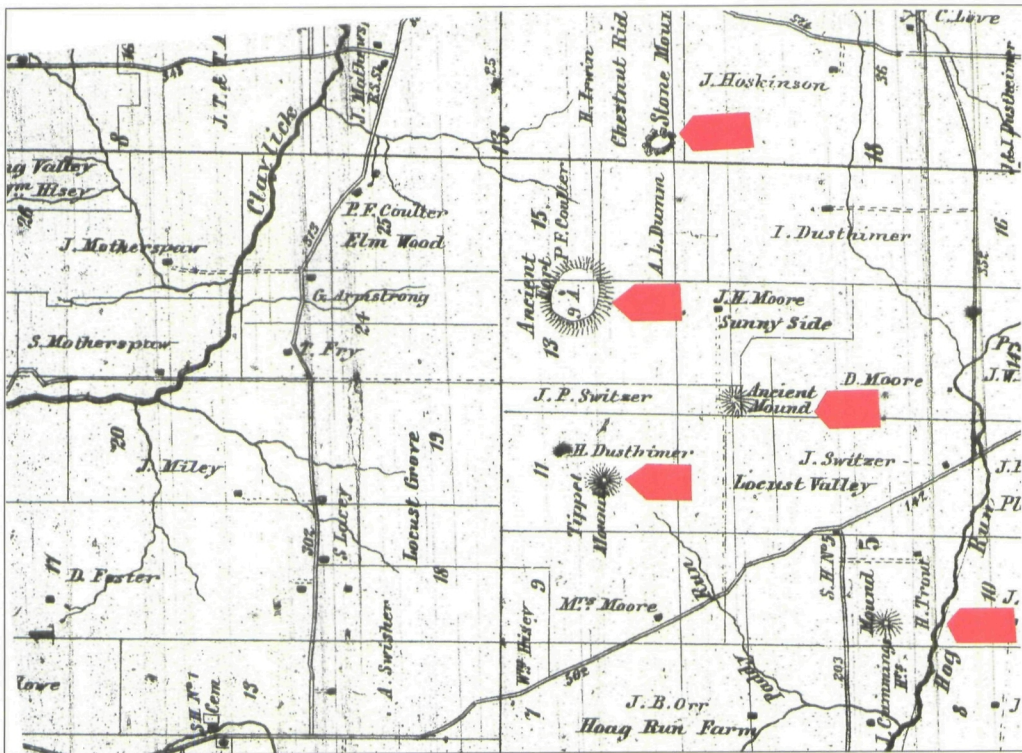


Figure 1 (Murphy)
Portion of Franklin Township,
Licking County, Ohio,
from Beers' 1866 Atlas.
Irwin Stone Mound shown
top right Coulter-Moore
earthworks, Hentry Trout
Mound, Tippet Mound,
and Rutledge Mound
(on land of J.P. Switzer).



Figure 2 (Murphy) 1900 View of the Irwin Stone Mound
by Walter Metz.

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Figure 3 (Murphy) Irwin Stone Mound looking Northwest.



Figure 4 (Murphy) Irwin Stone Mound looking Northeast.